

## Eyrie

The wind was cold that evening; as she crouched atop her favourite perch, Anthea fluffed up her feathers and hunched her shoulders, curling in on herself against the chill.

Anthea didn't normally do this. Well, no, that was a lie. A lie she told herself every night when she crawled out of her bed and out to the rusting fire escape, scurrying up the side of the building until she found herself back in the corner between the water tank and the stairwell. Just one more night, she told herself, one last vigil, then she could settle down and put herself away like a good daughter.

Right.

There was no sign of Aleksis. He really only showed up on the warmer nights, when he could spread his coppery leather wings and uncoil his tail against the asphalt without having to fear letting too much of his body heat escape.

Beatrice never showed, of course. Too many vermin, not nearly enough velvet.

But then, Bea hardly ever showed anywhere. She much preferred staying cloistered up in her "tower" (really only a top-floor apartment in a midtown building, but Bea always had a flair for the dramatic), tucked as far away as possible from the "commoners". Anthea loved telling her friend she had been born a few centuries too late.

Anthea's breath misted out in front of her, forming a brief cloud in the air before it was shredded by the icy wind. She scuffed her worn converse against the dirty concrete, littered with cracks and cigarette butts and bird droppings, and huddled herself deeper into her makeshift shelter. She

pulled up the hood of her third-favourite sweater, the ratty green fabric covering her disorganized mess of hair.

She breathed the city air, the light layer of smog coating her lungs just as it coated the spurs of her feathers. Slowly, carefully, she sat up and stretched, revelling in even this small taste of the sky. It was nothing on flying, of course, but that couldn't be helped.

A siren screamed out against the night, and Anthea whipped her head around, wings mantling automatically against the threat. But there was not enough room in her little alcove to accommodate the manoeuvre, and Anthea's glasses came clattering off her nose as the crest of her wing collided with her face.

"Goddammit," she muttered, rubbing her nose ruefully.

Her mother's voice echoed in her ears: "If you don't learn control, young lady, you'll take your own eye out!" Well, what did she know. Anthea had gotten her wings from her dad; the only thing her mother had to worry about was keeping her hair from catching on the neat pair of horns that sprouted just above her temples.

She bent to pick her glasses back up off the roof and gave them a quick wipe to clean off the worst of the dirt before jamming them back on her face. The noise of the siren still had not faded; if anything, it had gotten louder, echoing off the brick of the narrow alleyways.

Anthea squinted. She could just barely see the flicker of police lights against a storefront window about a block down the street. The last time her mother had caught her roaming the streets in the middle of the night, she hadn't been able to leave the apartment for a week. She had missed going to her favourite café, run by an old Iranian man who had a missing tooth and a soft spot for wayward bird-girls. And the record shop down on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, with its eclectic mix of eighteenth-century operas nestled in with Elvis and a smattering of new-age indie folk.

Looking up at the sky, the stars barely visible against the ambient glow of the city's lights, Anthea spread her wings and flew directly toward the noise.

It was hard to see anything from aloft. The dazzling police lights obscured the scene, foiling all attempts to adjust to the dark. She could have dropped in for a closer look, but even she knew better than to antagonize the police.

Instead, she dropped down onto the roof of a building a few feet away and ran toward the fire escape. Aleksis could have squeezed between the buildings and landed right on the ground in the alley, and she'd seen Beatrice swoop in to land on balconies no more than five feet square. Anthea, however, was safer taking the stairs. Much safer.

When she finally made it to the ground, she tucked her wings in close to her back and tried to walk casually out of the alley, like she had been there all along.

The scene that met her eyes was not nearly as dramatic as she had feared, or perhaps hoped. There was no dead body, no thief tied up to their giant bag of ill-gotten loot. Instead, an old faun stood there in his ratty mauve bathrobe, shouting expletives with such vigour his tail ought to have curled. A policeman had a hand on his shoulder and was gently but firmly toward the open door of the cruiser.

The object of his tirade stood in the building's doorway, her face white, her hands shaking as she clutched the doorknob for support. Her plain brown hair was done up in a ragged topknot, chunks coming loose in odd places giving her a distinctly frazzled look.

Behind her the doorway stood dark, but Anthea could just about make out the lines of a familiar face.

She waited until the woman had gone back inside, then stormed up to the house and began pounding on the door.

It flew open almost immediately, and Anthea had to stop herself from knocking right on Aleksis' shocked face.

"Anthea? What are you doing here?"

"There were sirens and flashing lights; where else would I be?" she snapped. "Alex, what the hell is going on here?"

"Oh, that's...that's my great-grandpa." He glanced back into the house and fidgeted, his tail lashing the air anxiously. He hesitated, then stepped out onto the stoop and closed the door behind him.

"He was staying with my aunt, and things got...hectic. So she called me to see if I could help. Normally I'm pretty good at calming him down, but this time..." he trailed off, wings drooping below his shoulders.

"That sucks, man. But why didn't you call me? Surely between the two of us we could have shut the old geezer up."

He jerked his eyes up at her and half opened his wings, as if ready to flee. "It's kind of a family thing, 'Thea. You wouldn't understand." His eyes were hard.

She gazed back at him, unmoved. She raised an eyebrow at him, and the defensiveness slowly left his posture, melting back into apology. "Or I guess you would. Sorry, 'Thea."

Anthea sighed. "It's fine, I guess." She flapped her wings in irritation once, twice, and a few pale feathers drifted to the ground.

Aleksis noticed, and a small grin began to replace the misery on his face. "Woah, is it moulting season already?"

Anthea glared over the top of her glasses at her friend. He only grinned wider, oblivious to the painful death she was wishing him.

“I could have sworn it was only a couple months ago-” he cut himself off, laughing, as he dodged out of the way of Anthea’s vengeful swat.

“Shut the fuck up, you. I don’t want to hear a word out of your scaly mouth.”

“Yes, ma’am!” He snapped a salute that would have been near-perfect had it not been for the shivers already trembling through his lanky limbs.

Anthea sighed. “Come on you, let’s get you inside.”

Aleksis’ sheepish grin was only visible when the police lights illuminated one side of his face. “How about the diner over by my place?”

“Sure.” She grinned back, and abruptly socked him in the arm. “Your treat.”